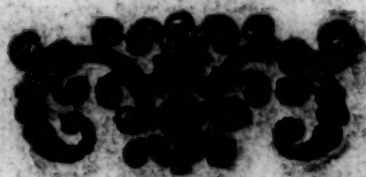


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Young GENTLEMAN'S
REPLY

To a BOOK entitled, B, A
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*Christianity not founded on
Argument, &c.*

In a LETTER to the AUTHOR.



LONDON:

Printed for T. COOPER, at the *Globe*, in *Paternoster-row*. MDCCLIII.

[Price one Shilling.]

THE

OXFORD

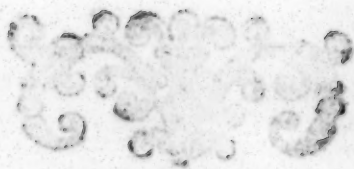
Young Gentlemen's

REPLY

TO A BOOK

Of the same name, published by
Messrs. A. & C.

IN A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR.



LONDON:

Printed by T. Eggar, at the Office of the
Author, in Pall Mall.
[Price one Shilling.]

(2)

T H E

Oxford Young Gentleman's

R E P L Y, &c.

S I R,

I Am surpris'd, as well as sorry, that the short Conversation I had the Honour to have with you at ***** should be the Occasion of giving you so much Trouble. That our Discourse, at that Time, turned upon the Subject you mention, I perfectly well remember. My *Words* I do not remember; but You it seems do, to your great Dissatisfaction. If I said *all* that you have put in my Mouth (for I would not be guilty of the Ill-manners of contradicting you) I said it unguardedly; for there are some Things in your Representation which do not agree with my Sentiments. My Opinion is, that " a Religion intended for *Men* " must be a *reasonable* Religion. That we are " not to take Things always upon Trust; but " so far as our Abilities and Opportunities will " carry us to examine and judge for ourselves; " and to this End, (which of all others I look " upon to be the most weighty and important) " I told you my Resolution was to bend all

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“ my Academical Studies.” I little thought, Sir, to have met with any Check in so laudable a Design as this; especially from you whose Judgment and good Sense I have always held in very high Esteem. But so it is, Sir; I find I have displeased you by the very Thing which, I hoped, might, in some Degree, have recommended me to your good Opinion; as what would shew me to be a *reasonable* Man, however I may have the Misfortune to differ from you as to some Points, which I think to be of great Consequence; but which You perhaps think to be of none. Nor is this the worst of the Case: For as I am not satisfied with the *Reasons* you have been pleased to offer, and your great Concern for me gives you some Title to an Account of my Conduct; I am drawn into a Necessity of holding Dispute with you; which, considering the Disparity of our Years, and other Circumstances which I need not name to you, may seem to be an Offence against the common Rules of Decency and good Breeding. In any *smaller* Matter, Sir, I should have suppressed my Dislike; but in so *interesting* a Case as this you must permit me to treat you with Freedom.

You begin with telling me, that if examining impartially into the Grounds of my Religion *be the Card I design to steer by, I must not depend too certainly upon the Assistance of Faith;* and that *if once I allow myself in doubting you will take upon yourself to answer for the Consequence*

quence that I never will believe*. And where is the Harm of this, supposing that upon Examination I should see *no Reason* for believing? I am not afraid of Names, Sir. I shall no more scruple to own myself to you an *Unbeliever* so soon as I shall perceive that my Faith stands upon no reasonable Foundation; than I now do to profess myself a *Believer*, because, so far as I have as yet gone in my Enquiries, I think I see Reasons for my being so. But upon what Grounds, Sir, are you so *secure* of this Consequence? You tell me that *to offer to sit down to examine is absolutely giving up the Cause of Religion*: Which it is impossible to understand without supposing that Religion is *void* of all Reason to *support* it. This lets me into the true Design of your Letter; which is to discourage me from undertaking a rational Enquiry into my Religion, by *assuring* me that there is no Reason in it. My Conviction, Sir, will depend, not upon your *Security*, but, upon the *Reasons* you have to offer to support your Assertion, and which you are so kind as to give me under your first Proposition, where you say, that *Reason could not possibly, both from it's own Nature and that of Religion, be the Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith*†. If you suppose that Religion is *founded* in Reason, it will be absurd to say that Reason was not a Principle intended to lead us into a true Faith. But admitting that Faith is quite an *unreasonable*

* p. 5.

† p. 7.

Thing, it is very certain that Reason *cannot* be a Principle leading us to it, nor could God therefore *intend* it as such. Taking this therefore to be your Meaning (and I cannot possibly suppose that you mean any Thing else) I now attend to your Proofs. If you *had* made out to my Satisfaction *a Priori*, or from the *Nature* and *Constitution* of Religion, that it has no Reason in it, you would have saved me a great deal of Trouble in searching after a *reasonable Evidence*, which no Religion *in itself* unreasonable can possibly have. But this I look upon to be a very *unpromising* Attempt. I do not think myself *warranted* by your Example to *take* any Thing *upon myself* before-hand. My Thoughts, such as they are, I submit to your Consideration; and for your and my own greater Ease I shall follow you in the Argument as it lies in your Letter——You ask then;

1. *Can it be by the Exercise of their Reason that Men can be required to think all alike*†? No; nor does God expect, or Religion require, that Men should think all alike. A right Faith is indeed but *one*; and therefore all who rightly believe *think alike* in that Respect. But Religion does not require Faith *absolutely* of all; but of those only who by their Reasons are qualified to be convinced. The Law is *general*, as it ought to have been: But as every just Law presupposes a Capacity in the Subject to *see* and

† p. 8.

obey it; it's *Force* can reach no farther than the Capacity goes.—There is a *true* and a *false*; a *right* and a *wrong*; in Arts, in Sciences, in every thing which occupies the Understandings of Men: And there are few Points in common Life with Respect to which all Men think alike. So that if the Variety and Diffonancy of Men's Judgments is a good Argument to prove, that Reason was not intended to direct us to a true Faith, it is as good a one to prove, that it was not intended to be our Direction in any thing else. You ask,

2. *With what Regard, with what Patience rather, can one of this Class be supposed to attend to Questions propounded to him, UNDER THE RESTRAINT OF THREATS AND AUTHORITY; to be talk'd to of DANGER in his Decisions, and have the ROD held out with the Lesson; to have Propositions tendered to his Reason with PENALTIES annex'd? His REASON (you say) ever necessitated to determine just as she does of herself, and by her Nature incapable either of paying Complements, or giving Offence*. Your Argument supposes, Sir, that no Law, which comes back'd with the Threats of Authority, can be a Law tendered to the Reason of Men; and therefore reaches to all Laws, Human as well as Divine. As a reasonable Creature, I cannot have to do with any thing that is not tendered to my Reason; and Faith, you say, is not ten-*

* *Ibid.*

dered to my Reason, *because* it comes back'd with the Threats of Authority. But this is the Case of *all* Laws; and therefore, if your Argument be good, it will follow, that Man stands exempted by his Reason from being the proper Subject of *any* Law; which is directly the reverse of what my Books teach me, *viz.* that I no otherwise fall under Law, than as I am a reasonable Creature.—But let us see, Sir, upon what Foundation it is that you have reared up this new Edifice, which sets us above all Law. It is this; that *Reason* is EVER NECESSITATED to determine just as she does, and by her Nature INCAPABLE of giving OFFENCE. Your Meaning is, that there is *absolutely* no Liberty in *judging*, nor therefore in *believing* or *not* believing. If this is true, it must be allowed you, that *Faith* and *Reason* can have nothing to do the one with the other; and that the Gospel was as absurdly published to the human Race, as it would have been to the Camels and the Dromedaries upon the Deserts of *Arabia*. But have you proved it? No. You *assert* it, and that is all. But this is a Point of too much Consequence to be laid down *arbitrarily*; and therefore you must excuse me if I make bold to inquire a little how far there is Liberty in *judging* and how far there is none.

It is very certain that the Judgment in *this* Sense is *not* free, *viz.* that it must always determine *as the Evidence appears*. If I see or think I see Reasons to persuade me, that a Proposition is true, I cannot help believing it. My
Faith

Faith follows of Course. But then in those previous Steps that are necessary to *prepare* the Evidence, and lay it fairly before the Mind; in these there is so much of Liberty, as, perhaps, in nothing more. What the Eye is in Respect of external Objects, *that* is Judgment in Respect of the intellectual Operations. If my Eyes are open, and a Horse presents himself before me, I cannot help seeing a Horse. But I may shut my Eyes if I please; and am I not then wilfully blind? So in *believing*; if the Evidence be in it's own Nature such as is apt to work Conviction, and the Mind attends to it, the Judgment immediately determines itself. The Man cannot with-hold his Assent. But be the Evidence in itself ever so cogent, if a Man will not listen or attend to it (which is undoubtedly an Act of Choice) it moves him nothing. And will not a Man in such a Case be *wilfully* an Unbeliever? If this is the Case, it will not be hard to understand how *Propositions may be tendered to a Man's Reason, with Penalties annexed*. For the *Penalties* concern those who *wilfully* reject the Gospel, and none else, as I shall shew in the Sequel. You ask,

3. *Can a Man be baptized into a rational Religion* *? Which Question in the Terms in which it is conceived, is a very extraordinary one. Can a *Man* be baptized, &c.—Why not, Sir? Will you give me leave to ask in my

Turn: Can a Man *believe* a rational Religion, and make Profession of it? I hope he may. And what does being baptized imply more than this? But by what follows, I guess you would have said, Can *that* be a reasonable Religion *into which* INFANTS are baptized? For you presently ask again, *Where is Reason concerned when BABES accept the Terms of Salvation by Deputy?* The Reason of the Infants *themselves* is no Way concerned in it. They have *no* Reason, nor are they therefore *capable* of Religion. But they may (so far as I can judge at present) by the Mercies of God be capable of being admitted to the Benefits of his Covenant. You, perhaps, may be of another Opinion. But what has this Question to do with the Truth of Religion? You lay it down peremptorily, that it is *the Pleasure and Ordinance of God* that Infants should be baptized; because, I suppose, it best suited your Purpose. For you know very well, that all Christians are not of a Mind in this Matter; and it shews that you are hard put to it for Arguments against Christianity, to lay hold of a *disputed* Practice, and build upon it as a *plain, express* Law of CHRIST. I do not remember any Passage in the *New Testament*, which says *expressly*, that Infants should be baptized; and as I am informed by better Judges, the Evidences for this Practice from Antiquity, though very early, do not fully come up to the Times of the Apostles. So that if I did believe the receiving Children into Covenant by Baptism to be so absurd a Thing as you seem

to think it; I should judge it to be much more reasonable to question the Agreeableness of this Practice, (how general soever,) to the Institution of CHRIST, than to reject the Gospel on that Account.

From these Objections taken from the *general Nature* of the Christian Religion; you go on to some Observations upon the *Method* in which it is to be *cultivated*; which you would pretend, are inconsistent with the Notion of it's being proposed to us as a Subject of rational Belief. For you ask,

4. *Is it probable that God would have ever laid a Foundation of Belief for us, and at the same Time have made it our Duty to subvert it? —But it is the Command of our holy Religion that we should cultivate it, in a Method conformable exactly to that of it's implanting, by Application to Heaven, and not to the Schools; by the Use of Prayer and not of Reason.—We are to pray for the Increase of our Faith—that we may be steadfast in the Faith.—In what Light must a Rationalist regard all such Application*? Your Argument plainly rests upon this Presumption, that the Use of Prayer, to confirm our Faith, and the Use of Reason in judging of it's Pretensions, will not stand together; and this you tell us in express Terms. For you say that all Application by Prayer for the confirming and continuing us steadfast in the Faith, is the DISAVOWING, in the Fulness of*

* *Ibid.*

C

Conviction,

Conviction, ALL FUTURE Use of Reason for our Security. How does this appear, Sir? Have you *explained* how or *why*? Nothing like it. You should have remembered, Sir, that Prayer to God, in Cases where yet Reason is allowed to be our Guide, is not a thing *peculiar* to the Christian Religion. The old *Heathen Philosophers* were *Rationalists* I hope. And yet they recommended the Use of Prayer. I will mention only *Hierocles* whom I chance to have before me; Εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἡ αἵρεσις τῶν καλῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν θεόθεν ἔχοντες, τῆς παρ' ἐκείνου συνεργείας, καὶ ΤΕΛΕΙΩΣΕΩΣ τῶν αἰρεθέντων, πάντως περ χρῆζομεν. Upon this he founded the Duty of Prayer; which was the Doctrine of the whole *Pythagoric School*, as appears from this common Maxim,

—ἀλλ' ἔρχεσθ' ἐπ' ἔργον
θεοῖσιν ἐπελάζομεν Θ ΤΕΛΕΣΑΙ—

What think you, Sir? Did these Philosophers, *disavow all Use of Reason*? Had they any Notion that Applications to the Deity for Help were inconsistent with any Endeavour of their own to do well? By no Means. For observe what the same Author farther says; Οὔτε γὰρ μόνον προθυμῆσθαι δεῖ τὰ καλὰ, ὡς ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ὄν κατορθῶσαι, καὶ χάρις τῆς τῶ θεῷ συνεργείας· ἔτε ψιλοῖς τῆς ΕΥΧΗΣ τοῖς λόγοις ἀρκεῖσθαι, μηδὲν πρὸς τὴν κτῆσιν τῶν αἰτηθέντων συνεισφέροντας. He considered the divine Aid which is implored by Prayer

Prayer as a Means not *exclusive* of human Endeavours, but *concurrent* with them to enable us to do well; and in the very same Light Christians consider it when they ask the Grace of God for confirming their Faith. And why I pray may not an Apostle of Christ say *it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do according to his good Pleasure*, with as little Offence to you as a heathen Moralist? I confess, Sir, that your Account of Prayer is perfectly of a Piece with your Notion of Faith, which you will have absolutely to exclude all *Will* and *Choice*. Is it possible (you ask) that we can conceive how Reason can ever found such a Faith as Grace can second or add to? *Encrease of Evidence is the only Accession to be made to rational Persuasion* †. You mistake the Point, Sir; or you wilfully misguide me. *Encrease of Evidence is not the only, nor the proper, Work of Grace*. When a Man, under *full Conviction*, asks of God to *confirm* or *keep him stedfast* in the Faith, what does he mean? Does he call for *greater Evidence*? No; the *Evidence* is *supposed* to be full and complete; for what Evidence can be wanting after *full Conviction*? What does he pray for then? Why he prays that God would give him a *Heart*, or a *Will* (if you please) to enable him to withstand all Temptations which may *corrupt* the Mind and estrange it from God. If a Man *now* believes upon a rational Conviction, does it therefore follow that he must *always* believe? You yourself shall answer for

† p. 10.

me it does not. *A rational Faith* (say you) *will ever be subject to change; and the most fixed Resolves and mature Determinations that Reason can make must be always ready to be turned about — as the Evidence shall shift to another Point*†. Yes, Sir; and supposing that the Evidence does not shift, but stands where it did; the Effect may be the same if Reason happens to be disturbed, and thrown off it's Guard by inordinate Passions. It is therefore just as easy to conceive, how Reason can *found* such a Faith as Grace can *second*, as 'tis easy to conceive, that Reason may be interrupted and disturbed by Passion; and that Grace may prevent or cure, what unassisted Nature works. If we might take you at your Word you believe enough and too much of the Power of Grace. But whether you believe any Thing at all about it or not, the Notion is intelligible and consistent, and that is enough for my present Purpose. You next find Fault with *Education*; for you say,

5. *The very first Lesson of Philosophy; the first Step towards the Use of our Reason, is to explode, under the Name of Prejudice, all the Effect of our Education, which it is now, on the contrary, the Command of our holy Religion that we should industriously cultivate and improve* §. — Had God designed that Reason should be at all employed upon these Occasions, he would never have thus enjoined Things which he knew must absolutely destroy the Effect of it. If the Assent be required

† p. 26.

§ p. 9.

was to be a rational one it would be highly wicked and unjust to prepossess Mens tender Minds in any Manner before they came to the full Use of their rational Faculties. But now that we are actually commanded with early Diligence to retain our Children as so many sure Votaries to the Cause we profess ourselves, it is plain that a rational Assent is by no Means calculated for, or expected at our Hands †. —Your first Lesson, Sir, is a capital Mistake. We must explode, it seems, under the Name of Prejudice, all the Effect of our Education, if we mean to use our Reason well. What you mean by this the following Passage will fully shew. There is not one single Argument from Reason why a Man should not return to NEUTRALITY the first Moment he begins to think for himself*. Again; Nothing is more evident than that—to examine fairly we must come unprejudiced and indifferent to the Examination. Examination in the very Term implies a Suspence of Conviction; and therefore if Religion admits at all of Examination it must necessarily admit likewise of (at least a temporary) DISBELIEF. The rational Christian—MUST—originally have set out a SCEPTIC §. We see here what is meant by exploding all the Effects of Education. We must at once lay aside all our preconceived Opinions. We must become neutral, and indifferent to all Opinions alike. We must commence Sceptics, and (what is more than this) be for a Time even Unbelievers. This is the first, necessary Step to a

† p. 11.

* p. 12.

§ Ibid.

fair Examination! But will you be pleased, Sir, to tell us how this is *possible*? I marvel at your Inconsistency! Sometimes Faith is a mere *necessary* Thing, in which, *Will* and *Choice* have nothing to do. *Now*, it seems, it is so much in the Power of the Will, that we can lay it aside with as much Ease as we do our Garments. But how, I ask, is this possible? A Man has been bred up (we will suppose) in the Christian Faith. In consequence of this (call it *Prejudice* or what you please) he is *firmly persuaded* of it. What should *alter* this Man's Opinion, and bring him from a State of *Belief* to a State of *Disbelief*, but some *Reasons* or other which shew that his Faith is not well grounded? *Nothing*; for the *Determination* of the Judgment ever cleaves to the *present* Evidence. But if a Man sees *Reasons* to alter his Opinion, this implies that he has *examined*. *Disbelief* therefore, in those who have *once* believed, cannot, in the Nature of the Thing, *go before* Examination, but must always *follow* it.

You tell me, Sir, that *Examination* IN THE VERY TERM, *implies* a SUSPENCE of Conviction. I cannot grant you even this. If a Man is in Suspence, it will be a good Reason *why* he should examine, in order to be satisfied; but the *Term* carries not with it the *Notion* of *Suspence*, nor any thing like it. To *examine* a thing, is, *ad Examen revocare*; to *bring it to Trial*; to *compare it with the Rule*. I may do this for another's Satisfaction as well as for my own; as well to shew my Skill, as to cure my Doubts.

Doubts. If a Man should say, that a Stick in my Hand is not a Yard long; though by my Eye I am persuaded it is more; I may yet *apply the Rule*, and in so doing I *examine* it. But thus much I will grant you; that when, for *his own* Satisfaction, a Man examines his Religion, hearing it contradicted, and Arguments of seeming Force brought against it, which he has not yet considered; though the *Term* does not imply, yet the *Act* does imply *so much* Doubt, as that it is *possible* he may be in the wrong. And what if this is the Case? What if a Man has real Doubts, as to the Whole of his Religion, or as to any particular Part of it; and seeks to satisfy himself by proper Evidence on which Side the Truth lyes? Why then you ask, *By what Authority (if the Evidence happens never to take Effect) can a Man be obliged ever to be resolved**? By none, Sir. And what then? Why then again, a Man may go on doubting † *for ever, for Want of due Information. For who shall ascertain the precise Time for summing up the Evidence, and pronouncing Sentence? Who shall take upon him to settle the last lawful Point of Hesitation?*—No-body, Sir. A Man *must* be in Suspence till he can satisfy himself: And if he never satisfies himself, he must *always* be so. But still I want to bring the Conclusion home to your Point, that *Reason was not intended as a Principle to lead us into a true Faith*. Thus then it comes out, *viz.* that so long as a Man is in a State of *Suspence*, he

* p. 13.

† *Ibid.*

is in a State of *Condemnation*. These are your own Words. *In the Account of the true Believer all SUSPENCE and Questioning amounts to a peremptory and IMPIOUS Denial* *.—*We may be involved in the MOST HORRIBLE Degrees of GUILT before we can be better informed* †.—And more fully yet; *we must, if Reason be the allotted Guide, be obliged to wait till Reason can bring us her Report. Mean time, in this Infidel Interim, should Death surprize us, what shall now become of our Hopes without this NECESSARY PREPARATIVE (Faith) for our Introduction. You will examine, you say—Thou Fool! this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee—When Death has once overtaken us unfurnished with our Pass-port, what kind of Apology will it be to say, &c?—Hence you infer, that Religion can never be a Thing to be taught; that it must needs be something that does not require Time to attain like other common Lessons and Sciences, which are indifferent in their Consequences; since the very same Reasons that make it necessary at all, make it equally so every Moment of our Lives* ‡.

Really, Sir, had I such hard Notions of Christianity, I would immediately give it up as the most unreasonable Religion in the World. To give us Reason for our Guide; to tie us down to Enquiry, and then to *damn* us for Scruples in which, by all our Enquirings, we are not able to satisfy ourselves; will (I grant) in no sort stand with our natural Con-

* p. 12.

† p. 15.

‡ p. 17.

ceptions of the Justice and Goodness of God! You may as well tell me that God will *damn* a Man for not *running* who has no *Legs*; or for not *hearing* who has no *Ears*. — But *I have not thus learned* CHRIST. I know that Faith is necessary to all who *may* be convinced by the Evidence offered; but I do not know that it is necessary to those, who having done their utmost *cannot* free themselves from Scruples; necessary, I say, to *save* them from the *Penalties* which the Gospel threatens to Unbelievers. You tell me, that *the great Command* TO BELIEVE *is peremptory and absolute. No Conditions in the Case, that we shall believe if we have Time, if we have Abilities** — There are no such Conditions *expressed*; nor was it needful that there should. They are such Conditions as common Sense and Equity will supply in all Cases whatsoever. Say honestly what the Gospel is, and do your worst. But it is not fair to load it with Absurdities of your own Invention.

To come now directly to your Objection from EDUCATION. You tell me it is *highly wicked to prepossess Mens tender Minds in any Manner before they come to the full Use of their rational Faculties*. This I know is the Subject of frequent Complaint with those who entertain Sentiments not favourable to Christianity. But it comes not very properly from You, who have declared it to be so *easy* a Matter to *shake Hands* † with old Opi-

* p. 23.

† p. 4.

nions, and to come to a State of *Neutrality*, the *very Moment* a Man begins to think for himself. If I should clap a Yoke about your Neck, which you could break off again at Pleasure, you might say I did a very *filly* Thing; you would scarce say I did a very *wicked* one.—But passing this by, I will enter with you into the Truth of this Argument.

It must be granted, that the Prejudices of Education have great Force upon our Minds in Favour of the Opinions we have imbibed in our younger Years. But when you say that Education ABSOLUTELY DESTROYS *the Effect of Reason*, you contradict common Sense and Experience. Did you never know or hear of any Body, Sir, that *changed* his first Opinions? If I guess at you right, you yourself are an Example of this Kind. You were born in a Christian Country, educated by Christian Parents in the common Faith; and yet I vehemently suspect, that you are now quite an Unbeliever. But if this is not your Case, it is the Case of great Numbers, and always will be so. Change of Opinion, be it from bad to good, or from good to bad, though there may be Difficulty in it, is very far from being a thing impossible.—But why will you throw *Difficulties* in the Way?—How, Sir, will you help it? Suppose instead of this Precept of the Apostle, *Parents bring up your Children in the Admonition of the LORD*; You had read there your own Lesson, *Parents teach your Children NOTHING till they come to*
the

the full Use of their rational Faculties. What must the Consequence of such a Method have been? What *You* propose is, that they should come to the Examination of Religion *unpre-possessed* with any Opinion. But are you so little an Observer of Mankind as to think that this would really have been the Case? If Parents teach their Children nothing, they will by Degrees, as they begin to feel their Understandings, have Opinions of *their own*; (and by great Chance would it be if they stumbled upon the Truth) or if you could stop up all the Avenues to Knowledge, in *Shape* they would be Men, but in *Nature* they would be very little Superior to Brutes. You are very jealous of Inconveniencies from *preconceived Opinions*; are you apprehensive of none from *precontracted Habits*? Will mere *Opinions* (harmless perhaps at worst) indispose the Mind for Examination and Reflection *more* than *corrupt Dispositions*? Or is there no Hazard of such *self-bred Corruptions*, from the Neglect of Instruction? I can have no better Voucher in this Case than yourself. To your own Words therefore I appeal, which I think are a full Confutation of all that you have objected under this Head.—*Mean time the Powers of Darkneſs and OUR OWN CORRUPT DISPOSITIONS will be fatally gaining Ground upon us every Day—Our Paſſions will be aforehand with our Reason in Spite of all her Pretenſions. The Habits of Vice will be taking deep Root—and*

for Want of timely Notice—we may more than probably have embarked in wrong Measures at setting out and be lost in the Power of Habit, beyond Recovery, before we know where we are. Unprovided of all restraining Considerations, and at a Loss for a better Guide, we shall of Course give up ourselves to our natural Biass, and the Law of Inclination; and when we have lived the best Part of our Lives thus at Adventure, and stray'd so far without the Lessons of this sage Counsellor (Faith) they will go near, when they arrive, to find us actually engaged already, and beyond the Power of Precept to retrieve.*

This Passage is so much the more to be taken Notice of because it is brought avowedly to shew, that we ought, in our younger Years, to be instructed in the Principles of Faith. For you ask, *What is the proposed Use or Purpose of Faith? Is it not to influence our Actions, and direct our Conduct through Life? And when have we more Occasion for such a Monitor than at the Crisis when our Passions are most prevalent; in those EARLY YEARS when Reason is least able to form her Judgments in our Assistance?* Since then Children are to be taught the Principles of Faith, a Question naturally arises, *Who is to teach them?* An ordinary Man would be ready enough to say, *His Parents.* But this would be a very strange Thing for You to allow,

who have expressly declared it to be a *very wicked Thing*. The Secret then is this; The *Holy Ghost* is to teach them, (not a Faith subject to a rational Enquiry, of which they are not capable, but) Faith founded upon no Reason at all! Your Meaning, through all this Disguise, is plain enough to be seen. You think there is no such Thing as a rational Faith. You think that God could not *reasonably* offer Faith to us, because there is *no Period* of Time to be assigned in which it can be reasonably *offered*. Not in *Infancy*; we are not then *capable* of it. Not in *Youth*; this *destroys absolutely* all the Operations of Reason afterwards by filling the Mind with Prejudices. Not when we come to *Ripeness* of Understanding; for then if preconceived Opinions do not prevent Examination, our indulged Passions and Self-bred Corruptions will. But methinks You who see so clearly (what no Man of ordinary Experience can help observing) that an absolute Neglect of Instruction brings the very worst and the most irreparable Mischiefs to Youth, should have inferred, that there *must* therefore be some Care taken of us in our younger Years, and that God might, consistently with his Wisdom, offer us a Faith to be propagated in that Way. We breed up *Cattle* without Religion; we cannot make *Men* without Religion. They will be unfit for human Society. Give me Leave then, Sir,

to presume so far upon your good Sense as to suppose, that you are not a downright Atheist; that you have *some* Religion yourself, and are desirous that your *Children* should have *some*. Can there be a Religion without Faith? There can be no such Thing. You must believe, at least, that there is a God and a future Judgment; for without these Principles there can be no Religion. Will you instruct your Children then in these Principles? By your own Rule you *should*: For if you leave them to themselves 'till they are grown Men, it is probable that Instruction may come too late. But if you may instruct your Children in *these* Principles, why not in any other reasonable Principles? If you may propagate a Faith of your own chusing; why not a Faith of God's prescribing? You are afraid of Prejudices. Be it so, that you teach your Children some wrong Opinions. They may perhaps be able to correct these Opinions when grown up, as we see a great many do. But suppose they should not. Are there any Prejudices that a reasonable Man can instil into his Child, as *religious Principles*, that are worse than those he may contract of himself if he be neglected?—But still you will say, Faith is defective; and a right Faith is necessary to Salvation. Not, Sir, *absolutely* so. This is your own Doctrine, not the Doctrine of Christ. The Faith is proposed generally to all. The Penalties against Unbelief are alike threatened to all. But be-
cause

cause a Law is general it will not therefore follow that it admits of no Exceptions where the Reason and Equity of the Case enforceth them. Be the Case what it will, it lyes before *the Judge of all the Earth*; and *the Judge of all the Earth will do righteously*.

To reconcile yourself to this Way of thinking, be pleased to consider, how God hath dealt with us as to the Affairs of this World. These you consider as Things *indifferent in their Consequences*†; but they have Consequences corresponding to their Natures; *Knowledge in worldly Matters* bearing the same Relation to our well being in *this* Life, that *Faith* does to our Happiness in the *next*. Bring then your Argument to this Touchstone and see how it will appear. If (say you) God had intended us a rational Faith, he would not, by subjecting us to Instruction in our younger Years, have forestalled our Opinions and obstructed the Way to a rational Enquiry. Why not? Civil Science you must grant to be a rational Knowledge; and yet we must come at that by early Instruction, or for the most Part go without it. If you intended your Son for a Trade or Profession, would you send him in his Youth to a proper Master, or would you leave him to find it out of himself? I know which you would chuse. And yet Masters in Science are no more infallible than any other

Masters. A Scholar or an Apprentice may learn many Things from his Master, which he may find Cause afterwards to correct. Will you say that Mistakes of this Kind are *indifferent in their Consequences*? If a Man wants due Skill in his Profession he may lose his *Bread*; but I do not know that if he mistakes his Faith, merely for Want of a Capacity to judge better, he will lose his Soul. You will reply perhaps, That every Master must be presumed to understand the most *necessary* Parts of his Profession, and will not lead his Disciple into any *ruinous* Mistakes. Be it so. Why will not this Answer serve me as well as you? A bad Master, you say, is better than none; and an insufficient Guide, say I, is better than none. As in Arts and Sciences there are some general Rules and Maxims in which all agree; so there are and must be in Religion. Look into the various Sects and Denominations of Christians in the World, and you will find them all unanimous in such Points as these; that *there is a God and a Providence*—that *we are to love, fear, and pray to him*—that *we are to be just and honest in our Dealings*—*sober and temperate in the Use of our Passions*—that *Christ came to save us from our Sins*—that *by him God will judge the World*;—that *good Men shall be eternally happy and bad ones eternally miserable*. This, Sir, will help to remove a Difficulty which you have thrown in my Way; What must a
Man

Man do all the while he is examining his Faith? The Use of Faith you say (and you say well) is to influence our Actions and direct our Conduct through Life—to enable us to overcome the World. But what shall become of this promised Victory if the Contest must be so long depending *?—I answer, Sir. If I might suppose you to be a Christian, and that your Doubts concern only such Matters of Belief as are usually controverted among Christians, you are already safe. You have that Faith which will enable you to overcome the World. For as to all other Points over and above those which I have mentioned, and which every Christian, as such, must be supposed to have received and be persuaded of; though they may affect the Harmony and Perfection of the Christian System, or the Peace and Order of the Church in the Government thereof; and upon this Account may merit the Regard of reasonable Men : I do not apprehend that they much concern the *moral Conduct*. And therefore, you may observe, there are *good Men* of all Sects and Persuasions. But as I am afraid this is not your Case; we are to suppose that the Matter under Examination is, whether a Man shall be a Christian or not a Christian. In this Case it is certain that the honest Enquirer cannot have Faith, 'till he sees the proper Evidence; and how long he may be in discover-

* p. 13, 14.

ing this no body can tell. What has he then, you ask, to direct his Conduct? I will go one Step lower and say,—*Natural* Religion. If a Man believes that there is a God to whom he is accountable, he cannot want Arguments for a rational Conduct; and if his moral State falls short of that Strength and Stability which it will receive from the Hopes of the Gospel, he must be contented with it, such as it is, 'till the better Hope comes; and, no Doubt, God will be contented with it too. If my Son owes me a Sum of Money, and, to qualify him to pay it me, I put him into a Way of getting an Estate, I must have Patience 'till the Means can work; and if through want of Capacity the Project should fail, I must be contented to lose my Money. You will push the Matter now perhaps to the uttermost Point, and say, that the Enquiry is not, whether a Man should be a Christian or not a Christian, but whether he should have Religion or no Religion. What has he to secure his moral Conduct now? I grant you, Sir, he has *nothing*. But you must permit me to be of Opinion, that there are few, if any, such *reasonable* Creatures, of God's making. A speculative Man may, perhaps, make *himself* an Atheist; but GOD never makes Atheists except when he makes *Fools*. But if there is that Man on Earth, who, by the most honest and diligent Use of the Reason that God has given him, cannot find out his Being or his Providence; which do you think

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think most reasonable; that God should adjust the Measures of his Government to this single Case, or to the *general* Case of Mankind, who think and judge in a different Manner? If a Potter among a Variety of fizeable Ware should make one mishapen Vessel; I suppose he would set it aside for it's proper Use, and not turn the rest out of Doors, because it cannot be made to stand with them in right Order.

I beg Pardon, Sir, that I have taken up so much Time in considering this Part of your Letter, which appears to me to be not very material; and yet, so far as I am able to judge, here lyes the main Strength of your Argument. You think it a Reproach to Religion that we are left to learn it in the same Way by which we are to be taught every thing else; whereas, in my simple Apprehension, it would rather have been wonderful, if we had been to have learned it in any *other*. And what is the Reason, Sir, for this *Distinction* you give to Religion, that the Hand of Parent or Master must have nothing to do in it? Nay, that we must not so much as employ our own Thoughts and Reason about it? Why—we shall be filled with Prejudices—we shall be distracted with Doubts—we shall never know where or when to fix; and if we hesitate, we shall be involved in *horrible Degrees of Guilt*; we are *required at the Peril of our Souls to be in the right**; for *he that believeth not shall be damned!*

* p. 17.

I beg Leave to repeat it, Sir, that when the Means fail, through any unavoidable Incapacity in the Subject; be it from any natural Defect, or be it that Custom and Use has introduced a Kind of second Nature; the Case will always be in the Hand of God, who knows how to make the proper equitable Allowances, and will as certainly do it as he is just and good. Had any Christian Divine given so harsh an Interpretation of this *penal Law*, to throw Terror upon those who differ in *Communion* from him, what would you have said? But you, it seems, may do that to serve the Cause of Infidelity, which it would be unwarrantable for any one else to do to serve any other Cause. In your Account it is a *wicked Thing* to teach any Man Religion till he has attained such Ripeness of Judgment as will qualify him to examine it. Is it not as wicked a Thing to teach him *Irreligion*? May not the Mind be as easily prejudiced *against* Religion as *for* it? No doubt. With what Decency then, Sir, do you apply yourself to *me*? Why am I singled out to be made the Subject of your Experiments, who am but a raw Academic; and if I have Understanding suitable to the Measure of my Years, am certainly not yet furnished with the necessary Materials, to enable me to decide upon a Point which has exercised the Thoughts and the Pens of the wisest and most experienced Men? You say yourself, that *without some very considerable*
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Acquisitions of Learning, it is impossible to give any rational Decision at all in the Case *. I think therefore, Sir, that if you meant that my Reason should determine me in this Case, you must upon your own Principles have thought yourself bound to have waited a more proper Season. But if the Strength of your Art lyes not in convincing my Reason, but in taking Advantage of my Weaknesses and Passions; it must be confessed that you have chosen the very *critical* Moment.—To go on. You say,

6. *Were it possible that our doubting Disciple should not be in the mean time at this supposed Loss for his Duty on any Occasion; let his natural Obligations, as he may pretend, be never so obvious and self-evident, and his Practice never so strictly conformable; what if without this previous Acquisition and devout Temper I contend for the best of Lives is no Circumstance to recommend or qualify us for any Regard from the Throne of Grace? GOOD WORKS DONE BEFORE FAITH, and without the special Influence of this sanctifying Principle, are so far from being accepted in themselves as the Terms of a complete Obedience, that they do not so much as put Men into a nearer State for Favour, or a Capacity of being the sooner enlightened; they do not, as our Church expresses it, MAKE*

* p. 13.

MEN MEET TO RECEIVE GRACE. *The exactest Observer of the moral Law is a vile and wretched Sinner in God's Account as long as he proceeds by human Lights and Motives, and upon the Strength of mere Ethicks only. Nay, even his most virtuous Actions themselves are highly criminal and displeasing to God as long as he continues in such a Disposition of Mind, as they are undoubtedly of a Nature corrupt and unregenerate**. The single Point to which this Passage can pertinently be applied is, whether supposing a Man not to believe through some unavoidable Impediment, a right Conduct formed upon the Principles of natural Religion, will not be so far accepted of GOD as to save him from the Penalties of the Law, threatned against Unbelievers. If it will not, Enquiry will be a dangerous Thing; and if we will have Faith, we must have It before we can see Reasons for believing. This, as I apprehend, is the Absurdity you would charge upon the Gospel; for you say, in Effect, that natural Religion with all it's Fruits will stand a Man in no Stead. And hence you infer, that we must be *provided of our Creed*, not only without reasoning about it, (which you say is *utterly inconsistent with the Pretensions of all such as call themselves Christians*) but even before we are warranted to pray so much as for *Faith itself*, i. e. in other Words, before we

* p. 15, 16.

believe; for if I pray for Faith, it is to be presumed, that *as yet* I have it not. These are strange Notions, Sir; and the Gospel will deserve all the Contempt you bestow upon it, if you can find them *there*. But how do you prove, that natural Religion will stand a Man in no Stead? Why, by appealing to an Article of the Church of *England*, which says, that *Works done before the Grace of CHRIST, are not pleasant to God, nor do they make Men meet to receive Grace*. I am not Divine enough, Sir, to settle the precise Meaning of this Article. It may possibly be this, that our best and most perfect natural State is so defective, that we cannot plead Acceptance with God, without his *free, undeserved* Mercy in the Pardon of our Sins; which I think is true. But supposing the Doctrine of the Article to be as you would represent it, what would be the Consequence? Are you of those who think it reasonable to set down the Decisions of a particular Church as the Standard of the Christian Doctrine? For *Decency* you do indeed quote a Text of Scripture; *Whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin*. But you cannot, I apprehend, lay any real Stress upon this, which even I (unskilled in the Scriptures as I am) can see is nothing to the Purpose. The Apostle was speaking of eating certain Meats, concerning which the Question was, whether they might lawfully be eaten or not. In these Cases he directs,
that

that every Man should take Care to satisfy his own Judgment, and not do any thing unpersuaded of the Lawfulness of it. *I know and am persuaded that nothing is unclean OF ITSELF; but to him that ESTEEMETH any thing to be unclean, TO HIM it is unclean.* Rom. xiv.

14. To eat whilst I doubt whether I may lawfully eat or not, is not *of Faith*; and *whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin.* Ver. 23. What Tendency has this to shew that God will damn Men for their most innocent Mistakes; or that the best Faith they can get, the best Life they can lead, will be of no Account if in all Points a Man believes not aright? If you know of any other Text that says this, produce it, and it shall be admitted. But to say that the Church of *England* teaches this is saying nothing. For if it were true that this is the Sense of the Article (which I verily believe it is not) I would answer as I have already answered in another Case: It is more reasonable to give up the Article than the Gospel. You go on,

7. *The Generality of Apprehensions extend not beyond a SIMPLE PROPOSITION; and are thrown out at once at the very Mention of introducing a MEDIUM—And what an injurious Representation, what an arbitrary Image, is this then of our wise and good Creator, requiring a just Judgment of Things, and not giving Abilities to judge at all!—Again;*
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*The Nature of the Evidence of Religion in your rational Way being founded entirely on the Credit and Authenticness of History, a very critical Point to pronounce upon; it is impossible, without a good natural Turn for Reasoning, and even some very considerable Acquisitions of Learning superadded, to give any rational Decision at all in the Case. Whereas, how few are there that Nature has endowed with these proper Talents; and how much fewer whom their Education has adapted for any such Task *?* Will you please to consider, Sir, to whom and for what Purpose you are writing? You address yourself to ME who am bred to Letters, with Intention to dissuade me from examining my Religion. By what Argument? Why, by telling me that few are qualified either by their natural or acquired Abilities for such a Task. What is this to ME? If my Father's Groom or his Footman is not qualified to examine his Religion; I hope his Son may, upon whom he has bestowed a liberal Education. Why must I pin myself down to their Measure, and be that by *Choice* which they are by the *Necessity* of their Condition? As I told you before, Sir, I am not at present furnished with the necessary Helps to qualify me to decide upon this Question. But I may be in due Time if you will please to let me alone, and not beat me off from my Scent. But I see your

* p. 17, 18.

Drift very clearly. You are now doing that very thing which you are angry at my Parents for having done; *forestalling* my Opinion; and what you would insinuate is, that Christianity cannot be a reasonable Religion, because the *Evidence* of it is not level to the Capacities of *all*, nor, comparatively, of *many*, who are called to receive it. By your own Confession, Sir, this Objection does not at all affect the *Nature* of the Evidence, which may *in itself* be good and sufficient, how few soever there be who can see to the Bottom of it. This, I say, you yourself allow; for thus you argue: *It is by no Means sufficient that your Argument be indeed conclusive IN ITSELF, unless you can adapt it effectually to my Understanding too, and make it conclusive TO ME. It must be upon such a Connexion only that all my Duty in the Case can possibly be grounded. For in what Relation can any thing stand to me of which I have no Perception? Your Musick may possibly be just in it's Kind; but as long as I am naturally deaf, it is impossible for you to expect that I should ever pronounce it so from my own Knowledge.* All this is right, Sir. No Evidence in the World can induce an Obligation to believe any farther than such Evidence is or may be seen and apprehended to be conclusive: Nor will God condemn any Man for not doing Impossibilities; though you are so candid in your Judgment as to charge Christianity with this Absurdity. But when you
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would infer from these Principles, that Christianity is not a Religion calculated for *general* Belief, your Conclusion fails; for though the Bulk of Mankind are not qualified to trace up it's Evidence to it's *original Source*, and to view and consider it *in all it's Parts*; they may be qualified to discern *so much* of it, as will suffice to give them a *rational Satisfaction*; and if they do, the Effect of their Faith, as it regards their Conduct, will be to all Intents and Purposes the same. You, Sir, consider the Bulk of Mankind as mere *Stocks* or *Statues*; incapable of any sort of rational Deduction. *The Generality of Apprehensions*, as you set them forth, *extend not beyond a simple Proposition, and are thrown out at once at the very Mention of introducing a Medium*. This Matter, Sir, may soon be brought to Trial if you have a Mind to it. Step into the next Tradesman's Shop you come at, and ask him whether he can stand the Sight of a *Medium*, or is accustomed only to *simple Propositions*. He will think you perhaps to be a very odd Gentleman, for talking to him in a Language which he does not understand; but should you gravely explain yourself and ask; whether from certain Rules well known and understood, he does not draw certain or probable Conclusions; whether he can carry on his Trade without understanding Numbers and Proportions, without computing Loss and Gain, and the like; he would certainly conclude you to be *mad*. There is many a Man,

Sir, that was never taught *Latin* or *Greek*, that in any common Affair of Life can make as shrewd Work with *Premises* and *Conclusions* as I or you can. And why then, when Religion comes to be the Subject of their Consideration, must they be such very Fools, but because it suits your Purpose to *make* them so? Should you ask the meanest and most illiterate Man in your Parish why he thinks himself bound to observe the Laws of CHRIST, he will or *may* tell you; because he was a Prophet sent from GOD. If you ask yet farther, how he knows that JESUS was a Prophet, it is likely he may answer in the Words of Scripture, which he reads, or hears read to him every Sunday, that *no Man could have done those Works which he did except GOD had been with him*. If you still ask how he knows that the Scriptures are a true History; he can go no farther with you than to say, that he has always been taught to receive them as such, and that every Body else believe them so to be. If you think, Sir, that there is no *Reasoning* in this, no Use of *Mediums*; put the same Questions to a *Parrot*, and see what Answer you will receive. But, in my humble Opinion, this is as truly *arational* Faith, as the Faith of the most learned Man in the World. For what can the greatest Scholar say more? Why if you question the Authenticalness of the Scripture; he will be able to examine it's Pretensions by the ordinary Rules of *Criticism*, and upon his own Judgment
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on the Case, pronounce and evince the Evidence to be good. This will shew, that the learned Man has a more *extensive View* of the Evidence than the unlearned Man has; but it will not shew, that, whilst the Faith of the one is a *rational* Faith, the Faith of the other is a Faith founded upon *no Reason at all*. The one is as much a *rational* Faith as the other, but it comes by a different *Medium*. The Man of Learning sees the Authenticalness of the Scriptures by *critical Rules*; the illiterate Man, by the *Medium* of *publick Judgment* and *Consent*.

I expect, Sir, now to be told, that the publick Judgment is not infallible. No more, Sir, is my Judgment or yours. But if it is the best Rule you have to go by, you *must* be content with it, and *ought* to be so. Will you deny that the publick Judgment is in *any* Case, a sufficient Ground for a just and a reasonable Conduct? If you do; you will deny in *Words* what you confess by a hundred *Actions* of your Life. The Judgment of *one* Man is of much less Weight than the *publick* Judgment. Will you not, therefore, take a Prescription from your Physician, because he cannot make you a Judge of the Rules of his Art, and prove to your Satisfaction, that he administers to you properly? In Arts and Sciences, the top Masters may be able to trace every Rule up to it's first Principles. But *lower* Geniuses must take many Things for granted which they cannot
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prove.

prove. And if you will not allow this to be reasonable in Religion too ; be pleased to consider how far your Argument will carry you. The Consequences you are so much afraid of, are but the *natural* and *necessary* Result of the *Distance* in which we stand from the *first* Source of Instruction. Christ and his Apostles had *immediate* Communication with God. By *them* the World was to be instructed. Those to whom they could apply *personally*, they taught by Word of Mouth ; and when they died they left their *Writings* as a *standing Evidence* of the *Faith* they delivered, to be handed down (like all other Writings) from Generation to Generation. This was all *they* could do ; this is all that God can do, unless he should *perpetually* interpose by Miracles, and communicate himself to *every Individual* by *immediate* Revelation as he did to them. Your Objection therefore holds as strong against any *traditional* Revelation that *possibly* can be given, as it does against the *Christian* Revelation ; which you acknowledge, and, indeed, *insist* upon. In your way of reckoning there can be no Foundation for a rational Faith, unless there be a Foundation for a perfect *Unanimity* of Opinion, grounded upon a *full Sight* of the Evidence, *alike* in ALL ; and this you say (and you say very truly) there cannot be without a *constant* and *particular* Revelation *inspired separately and supernaturally to every Individual* *. But upon what Account, Sir,

* p. 112.

will you deny to GOD, a Privilege which he hath imparted to the *meanest* of his rational Creatures ? My *Friend* may communicate his Mind to me, by Letter or by a Messenger ; but GOD, it seems, can, in no case, acquaint me with *his Will*, unless he comes to me *himself* ! Can you shew a *Reason* for this Difference ? You seem to take it for granted, that in giving a Revelation for general Use, it must always be the Intention of Providence, that ALL Men *absolutely* should be convinced ; and that too upon the *same View* of the Evidence. Unless this is the Case, you have no Notion that Revelation can be a reasonable Thing. But this is supposing a Thing that can never be proved. The *Intention* of Providence must correspond with *every* End of GOD's Government ; and how can you tell that it may not as well suit with his Wisdom in the Government of the World, to give a Revelation, which shall be propagated by *human Means*, and consequently subject to the *Lot* of all other *human Things* ; as it would, to give it in any *other Way* by which it shall *certainly* and *universally* obtain it's Effect ! He that gave us Understanding and Will, no Doubt foresaw the natural Consequences. He knew that the Gospel would not be received by all. That some would want Capacity ; others Means. That some would be heedless and unattentive ; others drawn away by their Lusts and Passions. And how do you know, Sir,
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that it is not agreeable to the wise Views of Providence that it *should* be so? Do you know what *are* the Views of God's Providence? Are you able to govern the World better than HE?—But this is not the whole Difficulty. For if Religion cannot reasonably be offered to Mankind but in such a Way, as that the Ignorant and Unlearned shall not be obliged to take Counsel of the Wise; in such a Way, as that the *whole Reasoning* upon the Case, shall be alike open to Men of all Capacities; give me leave to say, that there can be no such thing as a reasonable Religion either *revealed* or *natural*. You tell me, Sir, that *the Evidence of Religion, in the rational Way, is founded entirely on the Credit and Authenticness of History*; which shews your Objection to be levelled *precisely* against *revealed* Religion; for *natural* Religion has no Dependance upon the Credit of History. *That* would have been just the same if the Scriptures had never been written to be a Subject of Dispute. But if revealed Religion be not therefore reasonably offered, because few are qualified to trace it's Evidence up to it's first Principles; neither is natural Religion for the same Reason. Natural Religion rests upon the Belief of a God and a future Judgment. But Men of subtle philosophical Heads may perplex these Questions with Difficulties, which the Bulk of Mankind are by no Means qualified to enter into. And the *practical* Duties of Religion; are they all clear

clear to every Capacity, beyond Possibility of Contradiction? You shall answer yourself: *Eternal Relations, moral Differences of Things, and a precise Delineation of the Religion of Nature, seem readily to occur, ALL as so many indispensable Articles to be treated of. And are these, however certain in themselves, such obvious Truths as can never possibly appear otherwise, and from which it is not to be supposed any one can possibly deviate, or withhold his Assent* *? How then (may you as well argue) can that be a rational Faith, which a Man cannot shew to stand clear of reasonable Objections? And how (may I as well put the Question) can a Man satisfy himself that there is no real Weight in such Objections, but from the publick universal Judgment concurring with him in his Belief?

Take the Thing, Sir, in this Light, and you will be at Ease about *ingenious Applications of mysterious Prophecies and their References*—about *learned and profound Calculations of Daniel's Weeks*—and about *the excellent Analogy of Reason and Revelation lately communicated*. I do not wonder at the Contempt with which you treat these Writers for their laudable Endeavours to throw Light upon the Evidences of our Religion; since I find you consider these and such like *Lucubrations as Proofs whose Force we are BOUND TO ADMIT as cal-*

* p. 42.

culated for the GENERAL and READY Use of ALL those to whom the Precept of Believing is addressed. But according to my simple Reason these Writings are offered to the World with no such View. They are addressed to those, and to those only, who can understand and be instructed by them. As to those who cannot they may let them alone, and be nevertheless reasonable Christians. It seems that however you may honour the sagacious Authors of these new Lights for their particular Discoveries, you cannot but draw to yourself very different Consequences from those they seem to expect from the Proposal of them; and that instead of availing to convince you of the Truth of any particular System of Religion, they have a just contrary Effect. This may be very true, Sir, and no Discredit to these Writers, or to their Lucubrations. For (as you very justly observe) the best of Arguments are liable to have greater or less [and I may add, good or bad] Effects, according to the different Hands they fall into. But your Reason, if you please! Why, they suggest strongly that such a Position can never be that necessary Truth, which stands in Need of any such far-fetched Apologies, and laboured Accounts, to reconcile and explain it. That is to say; That religious System cannot be a reasonable one, or reasonably offered to the general Belief, whose Evidence is such as*

* p. 41.

any Man may mistake; such as may be so obscured by Length of Time, as to want clearing; so perplexed by Doubts or Difficulties as to want opening or defending; because in such Attempts as these you must ever rise above the Reach of vulgar Apprehensions. Now, Sir, if this is a right Way of judging, I say it once more, that there can be no such Thing in Nature as a reasonable System of Religion; because any System you can propose will be liable to the same Inconveniency. But for God's Sake, Sir, why is it an Objection against Religion intended for *Men*, that it is made to stand the *common Chance* of all *human Things*? If a Man must rely upon the Judgment of others for the Evidence of his Faith (as it is certain the Bulk of Mankind must) he may be misled; he may be deceived. Very true; And is it not so in every Thing else? *If the Candidates for Heaven* (as you are pleased to express yourself) *were all Philosophers and Scholars* †; this I perceive would have contented you. But they are *not* all *Philosophers* or *Scholars*; And what then? Does it follow that they should have no Religion? None they *can* have, if no System of Religion can *reasonably* be *offered* to them. But where is your *Medium* now to connect the Premises with the Conclusion? *All Men are not Philosophers or Scholars*; therefore *no System of Religion can*

† p. 22.

reasonably be offered to all. The Reason, Sir, I say, is wanting; and you may take your own Time to consider what it must be. But pray let me hear no more of your *damning* Scheme, which you would not bear to hear of from any Body else if offered with any Degree of Seriousness. If you could make good what you have so positively asserted, and which, by your own Confession, lyes at the *Bottom* * of all your foregoing Reflections, that though the Providence of God hath left Mankind no other Way of coming at the Knowledge of Religion, but what will lay him open to Mistakes, yet the Gospel subjects the most honest and diligent Enquirer, if he is in the Wrong, to everlasting Punishment; I should, as I observed to you before, have nothing to offer in it's Defence. But to prove this, you must shew a Reason why the Law of the Gospel is not intitled to the same equitable Construction that all other Laws may challenge; and when you have done this I will give up the Point. But whilst I am convinced that God has always the Disposal of his own Favours in his own Power; and that though he has tied *us* down by Conditions, he is by none so tied down *himself* as not to be at Liberty to make Abatements for the Imperfections of his Creatures, and to deal by them as he sees right and fit; I can see no more Inconveniency in sup-

* See p. 23. Now it is to be remembred, &c.

posing that God should have given to Mankind a System of Religion, which, through human Defects, may fail of it's End in Multitudes of Instances; than I do in believing (what I certainly know to be true) that he hath left every Means of providing for our Happiness, in this World, liable to the same Uncertainty. If Providence may be justified in one Instance, it may be justified in both; if in *neither*, there is an *End* of Providence: And this is commonly the Upshot of such Speculations; to impeach the *whole Scheme* of GOD's Government, and to pave the Way for *absolute Atheism*.

Your remaining Objections it shall suffice to throw all together in their general Heads only. You say then;

8. Suppose our rational Enquirer has happily laboured through all Impediments to his Wish;—and is confirmed at last beyond all Remains of Doubt and Scruple in his religious Persuasions;—a Faith thus built upon Syllogisms will never answer it's Ends—nor serve to produce any of those known and ordinary Characteristicks that are given us to distinguish the true Believer. Why? Why—it will prove too cold—too changeable—it will not administer true Comfort in the Reflection—it will not be of Force sufficient to command our Passions—much less to make us suffer Martyrdom §. If by the

first Observation you had meant only to rebuke the fierce intemperate Spirit of some Zealots in Religion, who can bear no kind of Opposition or Contradiction, how modestly soever it may be offered; I should have found no Fault with it. If by the *rest*, your Intention had been only to shew, that when Reason has done it's uttermost, and we have all the Satisfaction about our Faith, that a just and a reasonable Evidence can give; yet still, in order to subdue our Passions and to keep us stedfast in our Duties under every Circumstance of Life, there will be Need of the Aids of God's Grace; you would have said no more than what all Christians confess and contend for. But if your real Intention is to insinuate, that the Evidence of Religion, when brought to a rational Examination, will be found insufficient to support ITSELF, and consequently the Duties it enjoins; and that the more a Man knows of it the less Cause he will find to place any Reliance upon it; I have a Right to look upon all this as an *Abuse* upon Religion, 'till you can bring some substantial Reason to justify such an Imputation. Pardon me, Sir, if I say I cannot *believe* that you express to me your real Sentiments in such Assertions as these;—That *the highest Degree of moral Assurance will never be a sufficient Balance for PRESENT Temptations* *—That *we shall hardly be induced to*

* p. 30.

quit what we actually FEEL, for any less Consideration than something which we actually KNOW—That our Reason bids us not part with the Good we have, to trust to Futurity for amends, if there be the LEAST POSSIBILITY of our being disappointed†. I cannot, I say, Sir, believe you to be in earnest in this, because it is so flat a Contradiction to every Thing that we see and know of the human Conduct. And therefore, Sir, I look upon it only as a mere Compliment; a Flourish of your Pen; when you tell me, that you will very readily grant me all the moral Certainty in the Proofs [of Religion] that I can desire; and farther, that this is indeed the HIGHEST DEGREE of rational Evidence, that the Nature of the Subject can possibly admit‡; because if you really did allow to Religion the full Weight of moral Certainty, it might be hoped, that you would very readily apprehend that Faith, founded upon such Certainty, might have Force enough to engage us to a suitable Practice; and that we might see Reason sufficient to induce us to quit the present Good for the Sake of something better to come, as we do in many other very important Instances, where our Conduct can be grounded at most but upon a moral Certainty, but many Times not even upon that. But how will this agree with what you have said almost in the same Breath, viz. That

† p. 32.

‡ Ibid.

however

however forcibly such an Evidence may operate for the present upon our Judgment, whilst actually under Consultation—and induce us, at our speculative Hours, to pronounce peremptorily in Behalf of it's full Sufficiency—We shall see all it's TRUE AMOUNT and WEIGHT in a juster Light, at those Seasons when we expect to make Use of it—and shall be apt to remember—that it is NOTHING MORE than PRECARIOUS CONJECTURE. If I am to take your Meaning from this last Passage, and say, that the Evidence of Religion is nothing more than *precarious Conjecture*; I can, upon this Construction, (and upon *no other*) very easily reconcile it to myself how Faith should be so *changeable* a Thing as you affect to represent it; and I shall be ready to confess with you that the Martyrs of old, who suffered Death for their Religion's Sake, *died like Fools* §. Which then will you stand by? Will you allow, that Faith has the full Weight of moral Certainty on it's Side? If so, there is an End of your Objections. But if you will say that it is no more than *precarious Conjecture*; this is what I expect you should *prove*. But what *have* you done towards this, Sir? Why you have thrown in my Way certain *presumptive Obstacles* *, as you call them, to induce me to believe that the Evidence for Christianity cannot be a rational Evidence. Sir, these *presump-*

tive Obstacles have been considered; and I have given you my Reasons why I think that they will, by no Means, bear the Weight you are willing to lay upon them. What have you then to do next? Why to produce the Evidence *itself* and shew that it is insufficient. This is the Point with which (with great Submission) you ought to have *begun*. You would prove to me that Christianity *cannot* be a reasonable System of Religion, nor therefore have a rational Evidence to support it. To what Purpose? Shew me only that it *has* not, and I shall be satisfied. How easy this is you perhaps may know better than I. The other, I am satisfied, is *impossible*. You may think, Sir, perhaps, that I am not at present proficient enough in Learning to be a Judge of *this* Question; and you will think very right. But why then will you *forestal* me? Why am I to be *discouraged* from taking the proper Steps to *qualify* myself to be a Judge? This betrays some Suspicion of your own Cause; and looks as if you was *afraid* that the Evidence (which by your making so free with it, I ought to presume you are well acquainted with yourself) when it comes to be laid open and brought to a fair Trial, will be found to have a great deal more in it than you are willing it should be thought to have. This then, Sir, I must insist upon with you as a Demand of common Right, that you no more *offend* my *Ears*, till I am in a Capacity to have my *Understanding*

H better

better informed. But this I beg Leave to tell you before-hand, that whenever you think fit to come to the Point I shall expect something more than loose and general Allegations, about the Uncertainty of *venerable Tradition and historical Records* *. I think that historical Evidence may be so circumstanced as to be a *very rational* Evidence; and shall therefore expect to have it made out to me very clearly, why the Scripture History has not as good Pretensions to be received as any other ancient History. You treat the historical facts of Scripture as mere *Hearsay*, I want to have a Reason *why* you thus treat them. Reason you have, no Doubt; for he that will reject all Accounts of ancient Facts, *merely* because they are *ancient*; is not a Man fit to be talked with? If he is *consistent* to his Principles, he will turn out a *Fool* in *common Life*, as well as a *Sceptic* in *Religion*.

Your second Proposition comes now under Consideration, which is, that *it is plain from Scripture, that no Appeal to the Understanding was actually ever made or intended to be made by CHRIST or his Apostles*; and to support this, you undertake to give us a *plain Narrative of their History as far as it relates to the Business of planting the Gospel, and the Manner by which it was attempted* *. You might have spared

* p. 35, 36.

yourself this Trouble. I have the authentick Narrative in my own Hands, where I read plainly and explicitly, that the Evidence which CHRIST and his Apostles offered to convince Mankind that they came from GOD, was the Evidence of Miracles. And is not an Appeal to the Evidence of Miracles an Appeal to the Understanding? It may be your Belief, perhaps, that no Miracles ever were wrought in Confirmation of the Gospel; and by the little Reverence you have shewn to the Scriptures I judge it so to be. But whilst you admit *in the Argument* that Miracles were wrought; to deny that any Appeal was made or intended to be made to the *Understandings* of Men in the Way of Evidence, is a gross Affront to common Sense. For why were they wrought but to stand as Evidence? Upon any other Foot, they might as well have been wrought among Horses or Mules as among Men. To what Purpose do you suggest, that Miracles have been undoubtedly performed as well in Favour of false Doctrines as true—that they concur only in contributing their Part jointly with other concomitant Circumstances towards the raising all together a full and competent Evidence for our Reliance? These Suggestions would have been properly offered if the Point in Question had been whether Miracles are a real Evidence, or how far, and in what Respect they are so. But admitting all you say to be true, it has not the least

Tendency to shew, that CHRIST and his Apostles did not *appeal* to Miracles *as* to a *reasonable Evidence* of their Mission; an Assertion that must be shocking to every Man that has read his Bible, or knows any thing at all of the Matter it contains. To what Purpose then, again, have you ransack'd the *New Testament* to pick up Passages to prove what it is *impossible* to prove? Alas! Sir, I have not the Talents that are necessary to qualify me for a Commentator; but I have a common Degree of natural Sense, and I do know (what every one who has but superficially read the Scriptures must know) that CHRIST and his Apostles did in the *strongest Terms* appeal to their Miracles *as Evidence*; that is, in other Words, *to the Understandings* of Men; for how they should judge of the Weight of this Evidence otherwise than *by their Understandings*, *You* may know, perhaps, but I can never be made to apprehend. You must excuse me therefore, Sir, if I do not enter any farther into this Part of your Letter; as likewise if I entirely neglect your *labour'd* Attempts to prove that the true Foundation of Faith, according to the Scriptures, is not Reason (with which, in your Account, Faith has nothing to do) but the Operation of the Holy Ghost *irradiating our Souls at once with a thorough Conviction*. You must, I say, Sir, excuse me from meddling with these Matters so much beyond

beyond my Reach; and I have the greater Right yet to demand an Excuse, because you seem to lay no Stress upon them yourself. You tell me, that you *may possibly in the Haste of Your Zeal have laid yourself open to Me unguardedly enough through the Course and Prosecution of your Argument*—But you think it enough if the main Drift and Scope of the Argument may be allowed to be upon the whole maintained only with some tolerable Degree of Propriety, so as to carry JUST THE FACE OF SOMETHING PLAUSIBLE;—and you cannot apprehend, that any SAGACIOUS DISCOVERY, that you have possibly mistaken or misapplied any of those particular Texts that happened to occur to your Memory upon this Occasion (though, it seems, you are far from being conscious of having left the least Room for any such Charge) will at all avail to invalidate, and much less to overturn what You have been endeavouring to establish*. What you are conscious to yourself, Sir, or not conscious, is nothing to me. But this frank, this open Declaration from you, that neglecting the plain, simple Truth of Things, your Aim has been to dress out an artificial System, which might bear some colourable Resemblance only with your Sentiments; would be enough to cure me, had I ever such Inclination to examine your Authorities. For should I prove never so plainly,

* p. 105.

that

that your *Use* of Scripture is *Abuse*; I should be *ridiculed* as a *sagacious Discoverer*, and reckoned, in Truth, little better than a *Fool* in undertaking gravely to confute what you cannot possibly be presumed to believe one Title of yourself. No, Sir! your strong Hold lyes not here. Where then does it lye? You tell us yourself. *I might insist, that though I had not been able to have produced any of these positive Authorities—I might have relied with* ALL SECURITY *upon my PREVIOUS ARGUMENT, that it was IMPOSSIBLE in the Nature of the Thing*†. Again, *Some other Scheme than your rational one, you must see yourself obliged to have Recourse to, UPON THE SUPPOSITION, I mean, that you must upon Reflection admit the Conclusiveness of all those obvious EXCEPTIONS which I have been raising against the POSSIBILITY of it**. Here, Sir, is every thing in Effect given up excepting the *previous Argument*, upon which you rest the Whole of your Cause; and upon which I have bestowed all the Reflection I am capable of, without being able to discover any thing in it of Weight enough to alter my first Resolutions. As you set out with an Air of great *Security*, so you conclude with *Triumph*, in your *Recapitulation* of the Argument, which I shall set down in your own Words, with such Answers as will properly arise from what I have taken the Liberty to offer to you on

† p. 106.

* p. 109.

the Subject. These Things then you say you have proved.

1. *That Reason can never possibly be that Principle which is to make all Men of one Mind.*

Answ. Nor does Religion require all Men to be of one Mind. Faith is expected in those and in those only who are in a Condition to see Reasons for believing.

2. *That such Accomplishments as require Time and Parts to attain can never be universally necessary.*

Answ. Nor does Religion make them universally necessary. God requires Accomplishments suitable to the Condition in which he has placed us; and nothing more.

3. *That Faith both as a QUALIFICATION and for it's INFLUENCE is equally necessary at every Period of our Lives, and consequently can never admit of our going through a Course of Proofs.*

Answ. Faith as a Qualification is not equally necessary at every Period of our Lives. Before the Use of Reason, it is not necessary at all; *i. e.* (for this is what you mean) necessary to save us from the Penalties of the Law; nor is it necessary, in this Sense, at any time afterwards, but according to Circumstances. Nor is Faith equally necessary at all Times in Regard of it's Influences; if you mean that the
Influences

Influences of Faith will at all Times equally be *expected* or *required* from us. Where *Faith* cannot be required, it's *Influences* cannot be required; and that is the Case where the necessary Means of Faith are wanting. If you mean that Faith as a *Cause* is at all Times equally necessary to produce such or such *Effects* in our *Moral Conduct*, this is true, but nothing to the Purpose. This will not support your Conclusion, that therefore Faith can never admit of our going through a Course of Proofs. All that follows is, that Faith depending upon Proofs not equally obvious to all; it may happen, that all Men at all Times not being alike convinced, may not attain to the same *Stability* and *Perfection* as to their moral Estate. If there is any Absurdity in such a Supposition, shew me what it is. You have not shewn it yet, unless you would have us understand that as the Gospel *absolutely* requires Faith in all, so it requires, in all and at all Times, the same Degree of moral Perfection; neither of which Assertions are true.

4. That *as our Virtue depends intirely upon Faith, our Belief can never possibly depend upon our rational Conviction, the Privilege only of a few Students and Speculatists.*

Answ. It is not true that our Virtue depends *intirely* upon Faith, nor does the Gospel suppose any such thing. Men may *fear God* and *work Righteousness*, who know nothing of

JESUS

JESUS CHRIST, as *Cornelius* did; and the Scripture declares *such Virtue* to be *accepted*. Acts x. 35. Nor is it true that a rational Belief is *confined* only to *Students* and *Speculatists*. The meanest Christian has a rational Belief, though not grounded upon *the same View* of the Evidence. But it is the *same thing* as to all the Purposes of a good Life, and, I will add, as to future Salvation and Happiness, at least for any thing that I or you can shew to the contrary.

5. That *it is impossible to conceive the least Connexion betwixt the Notion of Duty, and assenting rationally to any Proposition, however strongly supported.*

Answ. It is *very easy* to conceive a Connexion betwixt the Notion of *Duty* and *assenting rationally*. Every Man gives a rational Assent who believes upon reasonable Evidence; and it is every Man's Duty to consider and examine so far as he is able, whether Religion has a reasonable Evidence or not. He that rejects Religion without such Examination, is *wilfully* an Unbeliever, and as such culpable.

6. That *Arguments are properly but Motives, submitted to our Understandings; and that of Course it can be little less than a Contradiction in Terms to talk of our being obliged to LET them be conclusive.*

I

Answ.

Anfw. No one talks thus but yourself. When I say a Man is *obliged* to believe, I do not mean to say, that he is *bound* to see Conclusions where they are not, or which he cannot apprehend. *Obligation* to believe presupposes the Evidence as *already* apparent, or as *apprehensible*. Where it is not so, no Man is or can be *obliged*; nor does Religion suppose him obliged, as I have fully shewn.

7. That *wherever* Consequences are to be regularly drawn, and there is a summoning of Evidence in the Case; the Issue can never with any Certainty be foretold, and much less enjoined and prescribed.

Anfw. By whom cannot the Issue be foretold? Not by Me, nor by You. But it does not follow from thence, that Faith cannot be enjoined or prescribed, i. e. to those who do or may see the proper Evidence of it. This is all that Religion supposes, or common Sense will admit.

8. That there is a vast Difference betwixt the being of sufficient Force to support a strong Appearance of moral Probability in the Nature of Things, and the Judgment of Men speculatively disposed; and the being sufficiently calculated to EXTORT an Assent from EVERY ONE that hears it. And that, therefore, however plausibly Christianity may be enforced as a FACT,
it

it can never be true as a GOSPEL in Virtue of any Arguments deduced from Reasoning.

Answ. Your Meaning is, that whatever may be said to prove Christianity to be *true*; it cannot be a System of Religion, intended for the *general Use* of Mankind. If it is not *this* it is *nothing*, for *such* it *pretends* to be; and that cannot be *true* which does not *truly answer* the *Character* it assumes to itself. But your *Reason*, if you please. Why; it will not *EXTORT* an *Assent* from every one that *bears it*. I so far differ from you in Judgment, in this Point, as to think, that if it *did* or *could extort* an Assent from every one that hears it, it would not answer it's proper Character. It offers Heaven as a *REWARD* to those who believe and obey it; and therefore there *should* be Room for *Choice*; that is, the Evidence should be such as, under the Influence of an honest and careful Mind, will *satisfy* Reason, not such as *offers Violence* to Reason, *howsoever* the Mind may be *disposed*. You, I perceive, Sir, are disposed to make yourself merry with this way of thinking; and are *sure I must have the justest Contempt for the ingenious Contrivance of abating a Degree of Evidence to leave the more Room for the Merit of Voluntiers* †. But *laughing*, Sir, is one Thing; *reasoning* is another. Tell me truly; would you present your Son with fifty Guineas

† p. III.

I 2

for

for *assenting* with you, that the Whole is greater than a Part, or that a Square and a Triangle are different Figures? Or can you not discern a manifest Difference between the Behaviour of one Son who accepts, and readily executes his Father's Commands, conveyed to him by the Instruments usual in such Cases, and from which he can have no more than a *moral Certainty*; and another who would believe neither his Servant, nor his own Hand-Writing, unless he came to him himself in Person to acquaint him with his Will and Pleasure. The Difference is visible; and the Reason of it is this. One Case shews a Will to *obey*; the other, a Disposition to catch hold of every Handle to *excuse* himself; which is the true *essential* Distinction between a *moral* and an *immoral* Man. And yet *such*, Sir, is the Satisfaction you seem to require in order to make Faith a reasonable Principle. For in your Account there can be no reasonable Faith without a *constant and PARTICULAR Revelation, imparted separately and supernaturally to EVERY INDIVIDUAL*, as we have seen before. If you will not believe, Sir, upon any *lower* Terms than these, I can see no Help for you. *Natural* Religion must go, as well as *revealed*. There is not that *Unanimity*; there is not that *Certainty*; either in the *one* Case nor in the *other*.

9. That, *the giving all Men Leave to determine of the Gospel, as the Matter shall appear to their Reason, is, if it happen to appear otherwise than true, a Liberty entirely destructive of the very Notion of a true Faith, authorizing Infidelity in Form, and settling it upon the same Footing, in Point of Conscience, with the Profession of Christianity itself.*

Ans. This is your last concluding Stroke ; that the Gospel insists upon Faith in all *absolutely*, upon Pain of Damnation. They are your own Words—*the sincere Disbelief of one single Person is evidently incompatible with the very Nature and Currency of our established Law, an Assent to which is so peremptorily required, under the heaviest Penalty, of all Persons, without any kind of Reservation or Distinction of Circumstances* †. I freely allow to you, that as, by your own Confession, the whole Fabrick of your *previous Argument* rests upon this Notion ; so, the whole Stress of my Replies rely upon the contrary Supposition, *viz.* That it is reasonable to presume, and in common Equity must be presumed, that God will make proper Allowances for all *involuntary* Mistakes ; which is what you are pleased to call *giving all Men LEAVE* to determine of the Gospel as the Matter shall appear to their Reason. The Dispute is then at

last come to a very short Issue. If your Notion is right your Cause is good. If it cannot be supported you must give it up for lost. To your *Reasons* then, as now offered, I apply myself.

You say, in the first Place, that this Allowance is *entirely destructive of the very Notion of a true Faith*; which I do by no Means understand. Because the *Notion* of true Faith must be the same, *however* it may please God to deal with Unbelievers. It is more to the Purpose what you say in the next Place, that it *authorizes Infidelity in Form*. I think *not*, Sir. To *excuse* is one Thing; *formally to authorize* is another.—But you have an Exception to this. You tell me that to say that the Sincerity of a Man's Intention will acquit him of the Law, *is as much as to say*—“ You will either do what God commands; or take Care to come prepared to justify your Refusal to his Satisfaction;” *never considering* (as you go on) *that all your Reasonings of this Stamp are grounded upon the monstrous Supposition, that God would enjoin a Thing that you should be able to give solid and substantial Reasons for not complying with**. You start at a Figure, Sir, of your own dressing up! There is nothing *monstrous* but in your *Manner* of stating the Case. God cannot command any Thing to *you* or to *me*, specially and absolutely,

* p. 117.

which either of us shall be able to give solid and substantial Reasons for not complying with. This were to suppose that God may command what is *unreasonable*. But God, as well as Man, may give out a *general Law*, which some particular Persons, either always, or under certain Circumstances, *by some Accident*, may be unqualified to fulfil; and in this Case, I say, that in Reason and Equity the *Command* cannot be understood as *extending* to such Persons—But you say farther; that this is *setting Infidelity upon the same Footing, in Point of Conscience, with the Profession of Christianity itself*. It is so, as to the Point of being a *Transgressor*, or not a *Transgressor*; and if there is any Harm in this I should be glad to be informed what it is — But you mean something more; for you say elsewhere: *If the Case of invincible Ignorance—be a Plea to be ever tolerated; and uncovenanted Mercy lyes still open to such, as from some natural Impediment, are constrained to refuse the Tender of a Saviour—What are become of all the PRIVILEGES of the Pale? Where are the mighty Advantages arising from the inlisting in the chosen Flock, if this Heaven be once presumed thus equally capable of admitting Out-lyers upon the same Footing, and allowed a common Receptacle for the Partizans on both Sides of the Question? But how preposterous to IMAGINATION to conceive, that at the taking the last solemn and general Account of the Friends and Retainers of Christ, that when*
proper

*proper Rewards come to be dispensed as due amongst his Followers, and the Mark of the Lamb, called for to be produced as the Characteristic and Claim of the Elect, that the great Judge of Hearts should then actually declare in Favour likewise of the just Exceptions of Unbelievers — and say; “ Well done good though unfaithful “ Servant; thou hast disbelieved me from Prejudices which I myself gave thee; enter thou “ however into the Joy of thy Lord! * ”* I do not wonder, Sir, at your shifting the Appeal from *Reason* to the *Imagination*; at your laying out all your Rhetoric to colour over a Principle so false in itself, and yet *essential* to your whole System. But you confound two Things which common Sense must ever distinguish. What I say is, that natural Equity will and must excuse those who disbelieve the Gospel, by Accidents which it was not in their Power to prevent, from the PENALTIES of the Law; and if you can really think (what you pretend to believe) that it would be *more agreeable to Equity for Christ to deny* (*i. e.* to condemn) *such in their Turn before the holy Angels who have denied their Judge*, in whom they had never the *Capacity* to believe; I have no more to say to you, but only this, that I am very certain that the Gospel will not countenance you in any such Opinion. But that such shall be vouchsafed *the same PRIVILEGES* with true

* P. 44, 45.

Believers, I never did yet say, nor does the Argument require me to say. How this Matter stands I must leave to Divines to settle; but this I can see, that they are distinct Questions; and supposing it to be as you say, that sincere Unbelievers, as having equal *personal* Merit, will, in Pursuance of this Sort of Reasoning, be admitted to the same Privileges with sincere Believers; what will you conclude from it? That therefore there could be *no Reason* for publishing the Gospel? I *suppose* so. But how will you be able to support this Conclusion? If an honest Mind sets all Men upon the Level hereafter, may not the Gospel, nevertheless, be a System of Religion useful and beneficial to Mankind? Useful, I say, to reform their Manners, and to bring on such a *moral State* of Things as is agreeable to the Dignity of human Nature, which is the Perfection of human Happiness as well in this World as in the next, and may contribute more towards accomplishing the *Ends* of God's Providence, than I or you can have any *Notion* of. If *all Men cannot receive it*, there are a great many that *may and do* receive it, and thereby become better Men. And why must the World have been deprived of a *general* Benefit, because *some few* are of so peculiar a Make that they *cannot* see it? Must the Magistrate make no Laws for the Government of the State, because some are *Madmen* and others *Fools*? Is the Necessity of *equitable Allowances* in certain Cases (and few

Cases there are in which such Necessity may not arise) ever thought a Reason sufficient to bar all *general Provisions* in *Kingdoms* or in *Families*? In no Case you can name will the Argument hold. Why it should do so in *this* you are now to consider; and since it is the *only* Point before you, I hope you will do it impartially.

I have now done, Sir, with the *previous Argument*, and consequently with the *Whole* of your Cause, which you have confessed, can *no otherwise* be supported than ON SUPPOSITION, that your previous Argument concludes right. I will take Leave, Sir, to make one general Remark upon it, which is, that, in the Main of it, it is nothing more than a very common Objection put in a new Dress, the Want of *Universality* in the Christian Revelation, which you sometimes complain of in your Letter. All I can say to this Matter is, that if God has *unequally* distributed the Means of Faith, there is the same Inequality in the Distribution of every other Blessing; and if you say, that Faith is of more Importance than any other Blessing; my Answer is, that when there are Obstructions of God's own making, Faith will be of *more* or of *less* Importance as it seems meet to the Wisdom and Goodness of God. However this Matter is, it is certain that God's Proceeding in this Case, is to be considered as *one* Part of his *universal Government*, in which if You think yourself qualified

fied to *prescribe*, I do by no Means think *myself* so. It is a Lesson of Humility which I have learn'd from my Parents, and which I hope I shall never forget so long as I live, not to *affect* to make myself *wiser* than God. The true Way, in my poor Opinion, is to consider the *Evidence*. If this is reasonable and sufficient, Objections taken from our *short* Views of the Ways of Providence can be of no Weight. For this Reason, Sir, I cannot consider these your Endeavours as a proper Instance of the great Regard you profess for me. If you wish me well, you should wish me *well informed* in that, which, as you say yourself, and very justly, is *the Subject of the World where it is the most material to think right* *. It is a very odd Way, Sir, of giving me Proof of this friendly Disposition towards me, to treat me with Arguments which *can never* determine the Case, but would, should they have the Effect you intend from them, discourage me for ever hereafter from thinking of it *at all*.

You will now tell me, perhaps, that I am quite mistaken in treating you as an Adversary to Christianity, who have professedly undertaken to set the *Gospel Evidence* upon its *true Bottom*. For your Sake, Sir, I could even wish that I was mistaken; for if you are not *religious*, to *Distraction*, it must be said, that you are *very profane*! But of this, Sir, the World

* p. 3.

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has

has a Right to judge. I *hope* I have *misreported* nothing from you. *Wistfully* I am *sure* I have not. If any doubt, let them read your Book, and try if they can possibly be of any other Opinion, than, that by throwing the *whole Weight* of Christianity, upon the INSPIRATION of the Holy Ghost, your Intention was, to leave it *absolutely* without any Ground to stand upon. Let them lay these Things together—That, the Gospel requires an uniform Faith in all, upon Pain of Damnation — That, Reason can never direct us to this uniform Belief — That, the very Methods prescribed by the Gospel for propagating the Faith, are *subversive* of Reason—and let them say whether all this can amount to any Thing less, than the declaring Christianity, to be *throughout* an *unreasonable* System. After this, Sir, say what you please about the *Influences* of the Holy Ghost, it can signify nothing. It will not make Christianity a *more reasonable* Thing than it is; and if it is not a *reasonable* Thing, I have your *Warrant* to say, (what every sensible Man must think) that *no Regard* is due to it. For is not this what you mean when you tell me, at first setting out, that you are *convinced*, as well as I, that *Opinions* founded in PREJUDICE, IGNORANCE, and NURSES TALES, are not that kind of KNOWLEDGE, wherein standeth eternal Life*? And is not this the

very Light in which you perpetually represent the Gospel?—There are some Things towards the Conclusion of your Letter, which would afford Matter of Observation : As ; what you have said about the *Reception* Christianity has met with in the *lettered* World — the Method observed by Preachers in recommending Religion—by the Universities in requiring Subscriptions — by Magistrates in erecting religious Establishments ; and the like. I do not think, Sir, that the *Truth* of the Gospel is at all concerned in these Matters, howsoever you have drawn them in, *in Aid* of your Cause. For *Religion*, I hope, may be *right*, though *Men* act *wrong* ; which is granting the very utmost you can ask. But I am not willing to tire you too much at once ; and shall therefore reserve these for a future Opportunity, if I should ever think it proper to give you any further Trouble. In the mean Time I am,

S I R,

Your most obedient

bumble Servant,

A. B.

E R R A T A.

PAG. 18. *lin. penult. for Lesson, r. Lesson. Pag. 50. l. 12. for Tracts r. Facts.*

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